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THE RUG ON THE COVER

AMONG the rugs¹ from the collection of James F. Ballard of St. Louis to be shown during November on the main staircase and in Gallery 50 are seven incompletely classified rugs of exceptional beauty. One of them is reproduced on the cover of this issue.² Its rare importance has induced its various owners to part with much gold to become its proud possessor; however, it was for sheer beauty and artistic excellence only that they paid. For, since the sixteenth century, and some would say even a century earlier, it has had an enviable place among the peers of rugs, yet no one has placed the undisputed stamp of provenance upon it. Persia, Asia Minor, and Damascus each lay claim to it, with Damascus somewhat in the lead. If of Persian manufacture one looks to the Kirman group for its counterpart. Only faintly, however, does it resemble this well-known group of rugs. If of Asia Minor manufacture one must admit that it stands alone, without prototype or substantiated proof, unless one associates it with the Ghiordes group, which it somewhat resembles. If of Damascus manufacture one can but wonder how a nearly faultless, sophisticated type of rug developed in a locality never famous as a rug making district, although well known as an exporting center.

Under the headings "Damascus" or "so-called Damascus" one generally finds this type of rug. Indefinite is its provenance, yet so excellent is it as a specimen of weaving and so beautiful as a work of art that we are prone to describe it.

The central scheme is three arched openings separated by double columns, one half the double column showing at the right and left. Under the central arch is a deep green field flanked on each side with a rich red field. Small flowers, resembling pinks, lilies, and blue four-petaled flowers

¹ Recently presented to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

² Size: 5 feet 6 1/4 inches by 4 feet 2 3/8 inches.

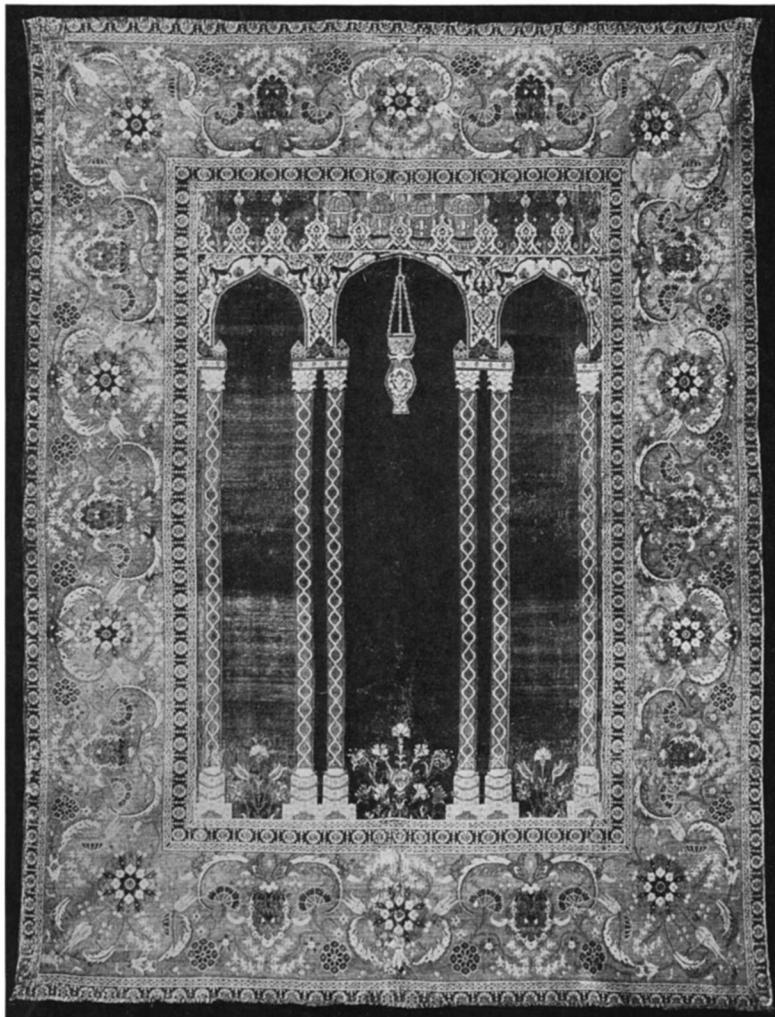
in bouquet arrangements, are at the bases of all three of the arched openings, thus producing the effect of a view through portals to a flower garden beyond. Hanging from the central arch is a fine example of a sixteenth century mosque lamp of colored glass with a three chain suspension. The spandrel above the foliated red and blue colored capitals has an old ivory ground with geometric and flower motifs in red, yellow, green, and blue, imitating the colored stone inlay of the white marble spandrels seen on mosques. Above the spandrel is a panel with four gate domes or perhaps mosque domes, hexagonal in form, with yellow sides and blue tops. It is possible that these four domes are those of the city in which the rug was woven. In the same spandrel are nine minarets in white and red, interspersed with cypress tree forms in green against a yellow ground.

The main border is delicate in color and pattern. Shaded lanceolate leaves form a detached meander inclosing floral medallions of composite flower forms in yellow and white; there is also a continuous interlacing flower scroll of pinks in red, yellow, and green, with white hyacinths on yellow stems. A double secondary border surrounds the main border. It is made up of circular conventionalized flower motifs and a double "T" formed by joined stems, in white on a green ground. Three guard stripes are formed with a running "S" chain pattern in white on a red ground. Red, yellow, green, blue, and old ivory is the full color scheme used.

We have before us the ideal possession of an art museum. Loved and cherished by the lover of art for its artistic merit alone, it has withstood the supreme test of appreciation in spite of the failure of the student of art to assign its provenance. Too often, perchance, in our art museums the student of the history of art unconsciously usurps the field of art appreciation, furnishing the art lover with only a substitute for true appreciation. M.

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SIXTEENTH CENTURY PRAYER RUG FROM THE JAMES F. BALLARD COLLECTION

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